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The connection between cultural background and students' motivation to volunteer

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This thesis explores the volunteer motivations of five student volunteers at the student organisation Erasmus Student Network Oulu (ESN). The thesis focuses on the participants' cultural background and investigates if and how it influenced their motivation. The effects of volunteer work on the participants and the challenges they faced are also discussed. Theory on volunteer motivation and culture has been utilised. Concepts such as altruism, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, culture and cultural values are discussed.

Five participants of varying backgrounds were chosen for the research and semi-structured interviews were conducted. Phenomenology was chosen as the appropriate methodology to analyse the data, as it allowed for an in-depth analysis of the students' experiences. The themes that emerged from the analysis were: personal and professional development, moral ideology, social connections and community, social norm and challenges. The theory of planned behaviour was used to explain the findings in terms of attitude, social norm and perceived behavioural control.

The findings gave insight into the world of the student volunteers and valuable information about their motivations to volunteer was uncovered. It was discovered that the participants' personal attitude towards volunteering and their eagerness for personal and professional development, as well as for social interactions were the strongest motivating factors for them. The findings led to the conclusion that culture did play a role in the participants' motivation to volunteer, where culture should be understood not only within territorial borders but also within social groups.

It was discovered that motivation is a multifaceted human phenomenon with different people being motivated by different factors. However, it could be argued that culture had influence on the participants' motivation to volunteer. The information obtained from the research is relevant because it sheds light on the student volunteers' motivations and challenges and can be used by volunteer organisations and education specialists.

Keywords: culture, phenomenology, student volunteers, theory of planned behaviour, volunteer motivation

Table of Contents

1	<i>Introduction</i>	5
2	<i>Volunteering, Volunteer Motivation and Culture</i>	6
2.1	Volunteering as a Concept	6
2.2	Volunteer Motivation: Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation	7
2.3	The Concepts of Culture and Cultural Values in Relation to Volunteering	8
3	<i>Theory of Planned Behaviour</i>	13
4	<i>Methodology.....</i>	15
4.1	Phenomenology.....	15
4.2	Phenomenological Reduction.....	16
4.3	Data Collection	17
4.4	Data Analysis	18
4.4.1	Transcription	19
4.4.2	Bracketing and phenomenological reduction	19
4.4.3	Capturing the sense of the whole	20
4.4.4	Finding and characterising units of general meaning	20
4.4.5	Finding and characterising units of meaning in relation to the research question.....	24
4.4.6	Clustering units of general meaning	24
4.4.7	Completing themes from clusters of meaning.....	25
5	<i>Findings.....</i>	27
5.1	Personal and Professional Development	27
5.2	Moral Ideology.....	29
5.3	Social Connections and Community	30
5.4	Social Norm	31
5.5	Challenges	34
6	<i>Examining the Findings from the Perspective of the Theory of Planned Behaviour</i>	37
7	<i>Reliability, Ethics and Evaluation</i>	43
8	<i>Conclusion</i>	44

References	47
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1 Introduction

Volunteering is a widespread phenomenon among people of all ages and cultures. Most commonly, it is regarded as any activity in which time and effort is devoted freely for the benefit of another person. (Wilson, 2000, p. 215) Volunteering can take many shapes and be present in different contexts, for example in humanitarian work, at sporting events and festivals, work with the elderly, or at a university organisation. Student volunteering has been accepted by governments as important for the formation of students' professional identity. (Jensen & Jetten, 2015, p.3) Thus, universities present a variety of opportunities for the students to volunteer.

But why do people choose to volunteer? Why do they devote their time and energy without seemingly receiving anything in return? In this thesis I will explore five students' motivations to volunteer at a student organisation during their higher education studies at a Finnish university. The main focus of the thesis will be to find out if and how cultural background influenced the students' motivation to volunteer. I conducted the research by interviewing volunteer participants from the student organisation ESN Oulu and analysing the collected data using the phenomenological approach. I applied the theory of planned behaviour to explain the results. I discuss the guiding themes of volunteering, motivation, culture and cultural values, followed by exploration of phenomenology, analysis and discussion.

The topic of this study was inspired by my own experience in volunteering which sparked interest to delve into the phenomenon academically. Some people volunteer in order to increase their opportunities for employability through acquiring skills and expanding their social network. Other students' motivation relates to their own personal values, such as helping others, wanting to make a difference in society. It has been proven that cultural background, social and political contexts have impact on people's participation in volunteering activities. (Grönlund & al., 2011, Randle & Dolnicar, 2009) The following thesis will explore the experiences of five student volunteers and see if and how their cultural background has contributed to their choice to volunteer.

2 Volunteering, Volunteer Motivation and Culture

2.1 Volunteering as a Concept

Volunteering is regarded as any activity in which time and effort is devoted freely to help another person, group, or organisation. (Wilson, 2000, p. 215) The world economy benefits immensely from the effort of volunteers. Because of the monetary value of volunteers, world-scale sport events like the Olympic games or FIFA World Cup probably would cease to exist without their work. (Bang & Ross, 2009, p. 61) Understanding what motivates people to volunteer can make the recruitment process easier and can also make the volunteering experience more beneficial by assigning the right roles to people. (Shye, 2009, p. 184)

Rochester, Payne, Howlett and Zimmerick (2016, p.13) define three perspectives on volunteering. The dominant view is that volunteering is devoting one's time to help less fortunate people. This view is based on the concepts of altruism and selflessness. Researchers have opposing views on what altruism is and whether it really exists. The term etymologically originates from the Latin word "alter", or "for the other". (Haski-Leventhal, 2009, p. 271) Some see it as helping others out of one's own free will without any benefit whatsoever. (Hoffman, 1978) Monroe (1996, p. 107) views altruism as an action intended to benefit someone else, even if it causes harm to the actor. Shye (2009, p. 184) points out the widespread assumption that humans will always try to maximize their personal benefit. And Smith (1994) does not believe that altruism really exists because by helping others, one receives satisfaction, which means that altruism is essentially egoistic.

The second perspective is the civil society paradigm. Instead of the altruistic and philanthropic motivation to help others in need, the activities here are more based on mutual problems and working together. The line of work usually revolves around public policies, environmental issues, transportation. Instead of working at organisations with paid managers, volunteers work at associations based entirely on voluntary work. In this paradigm volunteers take up the organisational leadership duties, as well as the operational activities. (Rochester, Payne, Howlett & Zimmerick, 2016, p. 13)

Finally, volunteering can also be seen as a leisure activity. The activities may vary from casual, once-in-a-while tasks, such as charity events organised locally, or project-based activities such as sport events and festivals. Volunteers typically engage in these activities because they

feel enthusiasm and commitment and want to acquire new skills or expand their social network. (Rochester, Payne, Howlett & Zimmerick, 2016, p. 13)

A distinction should be made between volunteering and helping. Helping is a relatively brief act. It can take place in an unexpected situation and usually occurs only once. Helping can be an important influence in volunteerism. However, volunteering is the kind of helping that is planned and considered for a certain amount of time. Volunteers actively seek opportunities to help others and may spend a considerable amount of time and energy devoted to helping. Sometimes volunteering can be a continuous commitment. (Clary & al., 1998, p. 1516-1517)

2.2 Volunteer Motivation: Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation

Ryan and Deci (2000, p.54) define motivation as “to be moved” to do something and therefore state that a person who feels the urge and has the inspiration to perform a task is motivated, in contrast to the uninspired person who is unmotivated. Motivation is not a phenomenon that can be easily defined because people have different amounts of motivation as well as different orientations of motivation. Ryan and Deci (2000, p.54) give an example from the school context where a student does their homework because the task is interesting for them and they enjoy completing it, because they want to achieve a certain grade or because they see the future benefits of completing the task. In all of these scenarios the student is motivated to do their homework but the orientation of their motivation is different.

To answer the question why people volunteer Clary and Snyder (1999) have adopted the functionalist approach, the main purpose of which is to show the reasons and goals of psychological phenomena. One of the main tenets of the functionalist approach is that people might engage in the same actions but to fulfil different motives. Clary and Snyder (1999) came up with six functions that influence motivation: 1) Values: one volunteers as an act of altruism and humanitarianism. 2) Understanding: one can learn new skills through volunteering. 3) Enhancement: mood enhancement through satisfying one's ego. 4) Career: one can gain career related experience. 5) Social: enhancing one's social relationships. 6) Protective: volunteering is used to escape one's own problems. The research concluded that Values, Understanding and Enhancement are most important factors in influencing motivation, while Career, Social and Protective were less important, although they can vary across different age groups. For example, Career is more important among young respondents and not so important among older ones. The results also showed that motivation is multidimensional and different volun-

teers pursue different goals, and the same volunteers might be motivated by several factors. Clary and Snyder (1999, p. 157) relate this multidimensionality to the altruism-egoism debate and conclude that often volunteers' motivations involve both reasons and cannot be classified as only altruistic or egoistic.

One of the theories that explains motivation is the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) which distinguishes between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. A person is intrinsically motivated when they don't receive any material payoffs for their actions but they simply find joy in the activity itself. (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p.55) In intrinsic motivation the action is spurred by one's own deep interest and it is done purely for one's own satisfaction. A person is extrinsically motivated when they are interested in the outcome of the action. There are different types of extrinsic motivation. One might want to perform a certain action because it is imposed on them, because they want to acquire something out of it, because they consider it important, or because they want to acquire recognition. (Tumblin, 2012, p. 4) In the context of volunteering, for example, people might want to improve their human capital through the volunteering activities they have to perform, widen their social network by meeting new friends or possible work connections, or simply acquire social recognition because volunteering is deemed respectable. (Antoni, 2009, p. 360) Research has shown that the results and the experience can differ depending on the focus of the motivation.

2.3 The Concepts of Culture and Cultural Values in Relation to Volunteering

It has been proven that cultural background has an impact on people's participation in volunteering activities. (Grönlund & al., 2011, Randle & Dolnicar, 2009) The following section will explore the concept of culture in more depth and relate it to volunteer motivation.

The term "culture" has proven to be difficult to define based on the number of different definitions found in research. The anthropologist Tyler defined it as a "complex whole" which includes art, knowledge, religion, belief, custom and any other abilities and habits that the individual acquires as a member of a society. (Tyler, 1870, as cited in Kroeber, 1985) This definition of culture was the dominant one in anthropology for decades. After that culture started being seen as an abstraction, as something that is learnt and shared. (White, 1959, p. 228) Hofstede (2001) describes culture as the identity of a group of people and compares it to what personality is to an individual. He observed that culture is an important factor in defining individual attitudes and behaviours towards the surrounding environment. Matsumoto and

Juang (2016, p. 14-15) define culture as a set of values, attitudes and beliefs shared by a group of people, but perceived differently by every individual, and transmitted over generations. Pieterse (2019, p. 46) posits that culture is not innate but learnt over the course of one's life. It is not an instinct with which people are born but it is acquired over time. And it can be shared not only between the members of one country but it goes beyond the concepts of territorial borders and historical backgrounds, which means that culture is "open".

Sewell (2005, p. 39) makes two important distinctions in the definitions. In one way, culture can be defined as an abstract category of human existence and it is often contrasted to other abstract categories such as politics or economy. When using the term "culture" in that meaning, one refers to it as belonging to a certain discipline, such as anthropology, or style of analysis, such as structuralism or ethno-science. The second distinction that Sewell (2005, p. 39) makes is of culture as a concrete set of beliefs and practices. In this sense, culture is associated with a certain social group, for example American culture, ghetto culture, middle class culture.

Pieterse (2019, p. 41-42) makes another set of distinctions in the scope of globalisation. He points out that cultural differences have changed form due to modernisation. While before it used to be a way to differentiate nationalities, nowadays it encompasses gender identity, political views, different types of social movements, minority rights. Another argument is that we are experiencing a so-called "clash of civilizations" and that cultural differences are creating conflict. Yet another view is that culture is becoming standardized as an effect of consumerism and a fourth one is that we are in the process of cultural hybridization.

The term "value" refers to the individual's preference of one thing over another because it is better, more pleasant, more likable or moral. The values are shared between the members of one culture and serve as guiding principles of what is considered good and respectable. These principles in turn contribute to the formation of the individuals' attitudes, beliefs and behaviours. Even though cultural dimensions are created by the individuals' personal values within a society, the two concepts are different. In terms of personal values, individuals might prioritize them in different ways. However, cultural dimensions represent the individuals' shared beliefs within a society which means that cultural differences or similarities can be compared between societies and not between individuals. (Oreg, Katz-Gerro, 2006, p. 1-5)

Oreg and Katz-Gerro (2006, p. 6) point out the theories of Hofstede (2001), Inglehart (1997) and Schwartz (1994) which all show that societies emphasize different goals which influence

individual behaviour. For example, in Western societies volunteering is understood as an act of the individual's free choice and volunteers are recruited by non-profit associations. Governments do not play a role in the recruitment process. Hustinx, Handy and Cnaan (2012, p. 57) provide an example from China where volunteering is still a free choice of the individual but it is also government initiated and is considered as an example of high morality and selflessness. Similarly, research conducted in Australia shows that Australians born in the country are more likely to volunteer than Australians born overseas. (Randle & Dolnicar, 2009, p. 230) And some American universities are even requiring the students to complete a certain amount of social work as part of a course or even as a condition to graduate. (Sobus, 1995, cited by Clary & Snyder, 1999, p. 158)

Abbey (2002, p. 71-75) conducts a study in The United States and Ghana exploring the connection between cultural background and the motivation for entrepreneurship. The study used Hofstede's model to examine differences in the cultural background of the participants. One of the dimensions that was examined in the study was the individualism/collectivism dimension. The United States ranked high on the individualistic dimension and they are also one of the most entrepreneurial countries in the world. Countries in West Africa on the other hand ranked low and thus showed a more collectivist society. Collectivist societies put emphasis on tradition and see the individual as belonging to the group while people from more individualistic societies tend to be more self-centred and competitive.

Bogdan and Malina Voicu (2009) compare volunteer involvement in Western and Eastern Europe. They note that volunteering occurs less in ex-communist societies compared to democratic ones. They explain that discrepancy through cultural tradition, economic background and globalisation. They point out that volunteerism is a new phenomenon in Eastern Europe. It was almost non-existent in ex-communist countries before 1989. They explain that there were certain movements, such as women's associations, ecological associations, youth associations but they were always under the control of the political party and had little to no room for development. During the democratic transition the associations were revived due to international agencies like the World Bank and the EU. However, because of the communist regime societies didn't have trust in public activities and were lacking participative culture. (Voicu & Voicu, 2009, p. 539-559)

Voicu and Voicu (2009, p. 541-542) outline two approaches used by social scientists to explain why people volunteer. The first one focuses on the resources of the individual and socie-

ty. It is believed that people with more income, social and human capital are more likely to volunteer because they have more to share with others. These people are also believed to be more attractive to organisations and are more likely to be recruited. Social capital is considered very important since volunteering involves cooperation with others and higher social capital is an indicator of trust in others. Many organisations recruit their members through people's social circles. So people with higher social capital are more likely to volunteer. Human capital is important because people who are more educated have more knowledge to give to the organisation. It is also perceived that these people would have higher aspirations. There is also a relation between income and volunteering. People with higher income usually have more time and interest for volunteering. On a societal level, a better economy also has a positive effect on volunteering.

The second approach focuses on beliefs and values and deems them more important indicators of why people choose to volunteer. The authors do take into consideration the individuals' values but focus mostly on national culture, such as education, frequency of social contacts, income, religious practice, age, gender, trust in people. The results showed that better educated, wealthier and more sociable societies are more prone to volunteer. (Voicu & Voicu, 2009, p. 550-553)

Voicu and Voicu (2009, p. 552-553) conclude that there are multiple reasons why people from Eastern Europe do not engage in volunteering as much as Western-Europeans. They explain that during interwar times the whole area was marked by a lack of democracy and most of the population was patriarchal and of rural origin. In the bloc-culture there was lack of individuality, the citizens were merely part of the mass and all efforts for individuality were crushed by the party. Public activities had the aim to show fake attitudes and emotions. The free work demanded by the state could barely be called volunteerism. This led to mistrust and unwillingness to do anything on someone else's behalf.

However, the percentage of volunteers in Eastern Europe is slowly growing. A possible explanation for that could be the impact of globalisation. Ex-communist societies are influenced by western culture and the result is new values, a mix between the two cultures. (Voicu & Voicu, 2009, p. 552-553)

As a conclusion, it must be said that the term culture is broad and unclear. The values, beliefs, and other features mentioned above as something that a society has in common can only in-

fluence an individual member of that society, but cannot determine their behaviour. (Spencer-Oatey, 2000, p. 3)

3 Theory of Planned Behaviour

The theory chosen to explain the findings is the theory of planned behaviour. This theory has been used to explain various ranges of human behaviours, for instance health habits, exercising, driver compliance, entrepreneurial intent (Engle & al., 2010), pro-environmental behaviour (Oreg & Katz-Gerro, 2006), as well as volunteering (Randle & Dolnicar, 2009, Greenslade & White, 2005, Bang & Lee, 2014).

Central to the theory is the individual's decision to perform a certain behaviour based on how strong their intention is. Intentions capture one's motivation and show how hard one is willing to try to perform the behaviour. Ajzen (1991, p. 181) points out that generally, the stronger the intention is, the more likely one will perform the behaviour, as long as that behaviour is volitional.

Intentions in turn consist of three determinants. The first determinant is the person's own beliefs associated with the action. The second determinant is related to the societal norm, or in other words the social pressure, to perform or not to perform the behaviour. The third determinant is the person's own evaluation of the control factors that may facilitate or impede the performance of the behaviour and their own decision to perform or not to perform the action. Personal attitude, social norm and perceived behavioural control make up the structure within which volunteering is investigated in this study. (Randle & Dolnicar, 2009, p. 230-231) These three determinants might vary and have a different degree of importance depending on the type of behaviour and situation. The role that these determinants play in the formation of the intention might also be different for each individual. However generally, the bigger the personal and social beliefs are that this behaviour is desirable and appreciated, and the stronger one's own evaluation is that one has the necessary skills, the higher the chance is that the individual will perform this behaviour. (Randle & Dolnicar, 2009, p. 230-231) According to Ajzen (1991 p. 181), the individual's intention to act a certain way is central to understanding what motivated them.

Clary and Snyder (1999, p. 158-159) provide an example from a research they conducted focusing on a mandatory volunteering programme. The results indicated that students who felt that the participation is in their control were more likely to continue volunteering as opposed to those who felt external pressure to volunteer.

The theory of planned behaviour is one of the leading theoretical approaches to understanding volunteering and it has been used in various studies. For example, Randle and Dolnicar (2009) use it to conduct a study investigating the volunteering motivations of people of different cultural backgrounds in Australia. Greenslade and White (2005) use the theory to predict above-average volunteer participation by elderly people. Bang and Lee (2014) use it to predict the return of volunteers at a large-scale sporting event. The theory of planned behaviour has proven itself valuable in the context of volunteering and that is why it has been utilised also in this study.

4 Methodology

As this thesis is dealing with people's experiences and aims to get an in-depth understanding of the participants' reasoning, a qualitative approach has been chosen as the most suitable one. The qualitative approach allows the researcher to understand experiences that they have not been part of and provides a bridge across age, sex, class, occupation, geographical boundaries. (Rubin & Rubin, 2004, p. 3)

The approach chosen to explore the data is phenomenology. Phenomenology deals with the way we experience things, with human phenomena. It explores the participant's view on the topic being researched. It is concerned with the participant's own experience of the event rather than giving a general account of the event itself. (Smith, Jarman & Osborn, 1999, p. 218) That is why it was deemed an appropriate approach to investigate the topic of student motivation to volunteer. The chapter begins by exploring phenomenology and the method of phenomenological reduction. Sections 4.3 and 4.4 explain how the data was collected and analysed.

4.1 Phenomenology

Phenomenology is a field in philosophy which focuses on studying consciousness and experiences from a subjective point of view. It was developed in the first half of the 20th century by philosophers such as Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Jean-Paul Sartre. As the name suggests, phenomenology deals with phenomena. However, it goes further than our sensory and sensational qualities. Our experiences are much richer in meaning and encompass also the objects, events, people, our self, the flow of time, as part of our 'life-world'. (Smith, 2013, para. 4-6)

According to Husserl the 'life-world' is the source of all human experiences. It is the subjectively experienced everyday life and it is opposed to the objective world of the natural sciences. Although they originate from the 'life-world', they are not part of everyday life. The 'life-world' consists of personal and social experiences, perceptions and events. Husserl was fascinated with the stream of conscious experience. Consciousness is extremely abstract and difficult to explain. It is directly related to experience and closely linked to time. In Husserl's opinion objectivity is a particular achievement of consciousness. He was deeply interested to find out how to eliminate prejudices which stand in the way of pure objectivity. He claimed

that the phenomenologist must free themselves from all presuppositions and taken-for-granted assumptions in order to conduct objective research. However, after Hegel many researchers have claimed that it is impossible for science to be completely presuppositionless. (Moran, 2000, p. 181-186)

4.2 Phenomenological Reduction

The problem of the foundation of scientific inquiry spans throughout Husserl's whole life and scientific works. He believed that science is compromised because of the scientist's agenda, opinions, beliefs, and assumptions, which lead to unreliable findings. He believed that scientists take as given the things in the natural world, which are never questioned, but are the basis upon which scientific investigations are based. Husserl says that if we want to access "the pure world" we must get rid of all beliefs and assumptions and return to the "things themselves". (Cogan, 2006, para 6)

In order to get rid of prejudices, Husserl put forth the method of phenomenological reduction, also known as bracketing, epoché, or transcendental reduction. It is the technique of putting aside the researcher's "worldly consciousness", or everything they believe "to be the case" in order to be unprejudiced. Once the phenomenologist liberates themselves from their presuppositions, they will be able to see the world as a world of essences, free from prejudices and assumptions. (Cogan, 2006, para. 3-4)

The phenomenological reduction consists of the epoché and the reduction proper. They are two "moments" which require and condition each other. They are called "moments" because they are not merely two steps that one has to perform one after the other but are internal logical moments that rather occur together. (Cogan, 2006, para. 31-32)

Husserl believed that we live in a world of "captivation-in-an-acceptedness", that is, a world in which we don't question our ways of life but just customarily follow tradition. We take for granted our whole existence and everything that surrounds us. As this is present for every individual, it is what causes us to be in captivity. The epoché is a procedure by which we liberate ourselves from that captivity, we free ourselves from all we currently believe. It is neither the belief nor the denial of the existence of the world but a transcendental state in which the individual becomes aware only of the phenomenon itself. (Cogan, 2006, para. 34-35) If the epoché is the method of freeing ourselves from the captivity of the unquestioned world of

acceptedness, the reduction proper is the recognition of that acceptance. It is the acceptance of having achieved a transcendental insight. (Cogan, 2006, para. 36) The epoché and the reduction proper are the two “moments” comprising the phenomenological reduction. The epoché is the “moment” of abandonment of the world of acceptedness in which we are captives and the reduction proper is the “moment” of transcendental insight that the world is not absolute. (Cogan, 2006, para. 40)

Cogan (2006, para. 42) notes that the phenomenological reduction is a rigorous meditative technique. He further points out that it is a self-meditation technique taken to the extreme and must be differentiated from ordinary meditation which involves only the mind. The radical self-meditation requires the participation of the whole individual and brings about a radical transformation similar to a religious conversion. (Cogan, 2006, para. 4) It is the process in which the self uncovers itself. But how does one reach that state? According to Fink (1966, cited by Cogan, 2006, para. 53) the true meaning of phenomenology cannot be attained within our natural knowledge but requires “a radical reversal of our total existence”, a change of all our beliefs about the world. The personal assumptions of the scientist regarding the subject and the assumptions of time and space, in which the investigation is set, are the reasons why Husserl is a critic of scientific inquiry. (Cogan, 2006, para 62)

Phenomenological reduction is an integral part of conducting phenomenological research and since I have personal experience with the subject at hand, it was imperative for me to attempt performing it. As any of the participants in this research, I had my own motivations to start volunteering and I was not supposed to let my experiences cloud my judgement when doing research. Through this meditative technique I attempted to free myself from my beliefs and presuppositions. Section 4.4.2 presents an account of how I performed the phenomenological reduction.

4.3 Data Collection

A total of five participants were used for this study and semi-structured interviews were conducted. All participants were students at the University of Oulu, were current or former members of the student organization ESN Oulu and were from varying cultural backgrounds. Participants 1, 3 and 5 were Finnish students, participants 2 and 4 were international students from the Arab region and Latin America respectively. All participants were around the same age and were studying in different university programmes. Gender, age, religious beliefs, or

study programmes were not taken into consideration but there were questions aiming to find out more about how volunteering is perceived in their families, social circles and culture. All interviews were recorded and transcribed.

The interviews were conducted in an informal setting chosen by the participants. I made sure that the participants felt comfortable and I informed them about the purpose of the interview and about the research topic. They were aware that they were being recorded and I assured them that I will not reveal any personal details. I explained that they have the right to stop the interview at any point and all the data would be deleted. I attempted to stay neutral throughout the interviews, not showing signs of approval or disapproval, but still engaged in the conversation in order to create a friendly atmosphere and to encourage them to share their experiences with me.

I emphasized to each participant that the interview was not an interrogation but a free discussion about their experiences. The questions were meant to guide the discussion and to provide a certain framework for it and did not need to be answered in order. The participants were also free to add other memories and experiences that had come to mind during the interview even if the question did not specifically address them. Sometimes the answers blended and answered more than one question at once and the order of the questions changed in the course of the interviews. This was not an obstacle as it provided a better flow to the conversation. The questions used can be found in Appendix 1.

4.4 Data Analysis

Richard Hycner's (1985) guidelines for performing phenomenological research were utilised in the following data analysis. It is important to mention that the steps proposed by Hycner are just one way of analysing data phenomenologically. They are not a set of rules that have to be followed but merely provide a framework that helps direct the researcher's attention to the issues that need to be addressed.

The following steps were performed in the process of analysing the data:

1. Transcription
2. Bracketing and phenomenological reduction
3. Capturing the sense of the whole
4. Finding and characterising units of general meaning

5. Finding and characterising units of meaning in relation to the research question
6. Clustering units of general meaning
7. Completing themes from clusters of meaning

The following sections explain the process of analysing the data and bring ideas from the interviews showcasing the themes that emerged.

4.4.1 Transcription

The first step of data analysis is transcribing the interviews. The researcher must carefully transcribe all verbal communication and note important “nonverbal and paralinguistic communications”. (Hycner, 1985, p. 280) Hycner (1985, p. 280) emphasises the importance of writing down every word and sound that was uttered during the interview in order to grasp the true meaning of the words. I listened to the recordings multiple times and transcribed every spoken word. All verbal sounds such as laughter, fillers and false starts were also noted down, however nonverbal communication was left out.

4.4.2 Bracketing and phenomenological reduction

The next procedure to be performed is reading the transcripts and listening to the recordings with as much openness as possible. The researcher should eliminate all presuppositions and should approach the data with an open mind. All personal interpretations must be set aside. It should not be attempted to fit the data to a certain theory but to approach it as a phenomenon with its own meaning in order to elicit the units of general meaning (Keen, 1975, p. 38 as cited by Hycner, 1985, p. 280)

As it was said in chapter 4.2, the phenomenological reduction is not an easy task to undertake, however, it was imperative for me to perform it, as I have been a volunteer myself. This was not seen as a limitation to the research because it provided me with a deeper understanding of the subject matter. In fact, Giorgi, Giorgi and Morley (2003, p. 178) write that philosophically, often the experiences described are lived by the philosophers themselves and that the ability to reflect on one’s own experience opens doors to new dimensions that would otherwise be inaccessible. My experience gave me awareness of the presuppositions I needed to be aware of. I did this by performing self-reflection and noting down my ideas in order to be aware of my biases. I was referring to these notes throughout the whole process of analysing the data.

Whether a full phenomenological reduction was accomplished is questionable but as Merleau-Ponty (1962) writes: “The most important lesson that the reduction teaches us is the impossibility of a full reduction. ... that radical reflection amounts to: a consciousness of its own dependence on an unreflective life which is its initial situation, unchanging, given once and for all.” (p. xiv as cited by Hycner, 1985, p. 281) Nevertheless, this was an important procedure to do in order to enter the world of the participants being interviewed and to uncover the meanings behind their words. (Hycner, 1985, p. 281)

4.4.3 Capturing the sense of the whole

After the phenomenological reduction was performed, it was time to listen to the recordings and read the transcripts numerous times until the general idea was captured. According to Hycner this provides context for the emergence of units of meaning and themes later on. He emphasizes that special attention must be paid to nonverbal and paralinguistic levels of communication, for example intonations, emphases, pauses as they might change the meaning of the literal words. (Hycner, 1985, p. 281)

4.4.4 Finding and characterising units of general meaning

Once the sense of the whole had been captured, it was time to move on to elicit the units of general meaning. This is “the rigorous process of going over every word, phrase, sentence, paragraph and noted significant non-verbal communication in the transcript in order to elicit the participant’s meanings.” (Hycner, 1985, p. 282) At this point the research question is still not addressed. The researcher simply tries to grasp “the meaning expressed in a word, phrase, sentence, paragraph or significant nonverbal communication”, which results in a unit of general meaning. (Hycner, 1985, p. 282)

Hycner (1985, p. 282) defines a unit of general meaning as “those words, phrases, nonverbal or paralinguistic communications which express a unique and coherent meaning (irrespective of the research question) clearly differentiated from that which precedes and follows.” I read the transcripts multiple times and I noted every meaningful word, phrase or sentence. As per Hycner’s advice, when I was not sure if a certain phrase or sentence was a unit of general meaning, I still included it just in case so that nothing would be missed. It is important to point out that it is not always easy to define where a unit of general meaning starts and ends and due to the different perspectives on phenomenological research, differences of opinion are

bound to exist. (Hycner, 1985, p. 284) The process of defining units of general meaning can be observed in the following example.

Example 1. Units of general meaning: Interview 2

Interviewer: “And in your opinion, is it worth your time and energy?”

Participant 2: “Of course. Of course it is. ‘Cause basically it’s the place where right now I meet a lot of people, still. Because at work everyone is just focused on, for example, achieving the target or finishing the task that they have, just everything is like a beehive at work. But then when you go to something like a student activity it feels like so relaxing and so soothing that everyone is just having fun and enjoying. And then you get to interact with a lot of different cultures, different people, you get to understand a lot of different things. And it helps with, I think, with maturity.”

Socialising

Positive emotions

Joy and enjoyment

Learning

Personal development

Example 2. Units of general meaning: Interview 5

Interviewer: “And did you have any personal goals that you wanted to achieve when you started volunteering?”

Participant 5: “For me it was much about personal development, which I mentioned a few times already. Like when I started university I was a little bit shy and not so.. I would say I’m a very introverted person but I wanted to learn to communicate with other people and understand different backgrounds and like, I’m like so curious like, because I study foreign languages and culture I’m very interested in those in general to get to like immerse yourself completely into this sort of things when you’re working in an international environment. So I feel like... and I’m hoping someday I would, I would like to work in a field where I do something related to international things, so I feel like this is a good practise for myself.”

Personal development

Curiosity and personal interest

Future work

The units of general meaning are marked on the right side. This process was followed with all the interviews and the units of general meaning were gathered in Table 1:

Table 1. Units of general meaning

Interview 1	Interview 2	Interview 3	Interview 4	Interview 5
International environment	Culture shock	Hobby	Mixing cultures	International activities
Socialising	Previous experience	Future work	Personal values	Flexibility
Desire to be useful	Personal strengths	Personal goals	Nice	Personal development
Learning experience	Socialising	Network with international students	Challenge: perfectionism	Helping others
Previous experience	Fun	Positive emotions	Fun	Challenge: managing tasks
Challenge: big workload	Positive emotions: relaxing, soothing	Challenge: personal relationships	Fulfilling	Challenge: time-consuming
Challenge: personal relationships	Cultural experience	Work experience	Personal strengths	Doing it for one's self
Challenge: high expectations	Personal growth	Learning experience	Personal goals	Learning experience
Personal strengths	Caring	Student community	Positive emotions: happiness	Personal goals
Personal goals	Caring	Student community	Positive emotions: happiness	Personal goals
Personal goals	Humanitarian work	Encouraged to volunteer	Positive emotions: feeling appreciated	Understand different cultures, backgrounds
Giving back	Personal goals	Learning about one's self	Positive emotions: feeling of service	Work experience
Work ethic	Learning experience	Challenge: studies	Doing something good	Positive emotions: feeling good
Work experience	Encouragement to volunteer	Challenge: time	Life meaning	Contributing to something
Positive emotions: happiness	Work experience	Challenge: work	Quality of life	Meeting people
Approval	Breaking stereotypes		Giving back	Negative: a distraction
Negative emotions: stress	Religion		Expectation to do good	Positive emotions: confidence
Respect	Challenge: time		Positive emotions: enjoying life more	Opportunities and experiences
Community	Challenge: stress		Challenge: time	Challenge: Finnish education system
Negative emotions: feeling peer pressure	Positive emotions: satisfaction, happiness		Positive emotions: relaxing	Challenge: time. Free time
Positive emotions: feeling welcome			Doing it for one's self	Challenge: money
Challenge: time, other priorities				

The units of general meaning are shown in order as they appeared in the conversation. As it can be seen, some of the units of general meaning appeared in several of the interviews, if not in all of them.

4.4.5 Finding and characterising units of meaning in relation to the research question.

Once the units of general meaning were noted, it was time to address the research question which focused on what motivated these students to volunteer at the ESN organisation and if there were any factors in their culture and upbringing that influenced their choice. I asked this question in regards to every unit of general meaning. If the participant's response answered or "illuminated" the research question, it was noted down as a unit of relevant meaning. (Hycner, 1985, p. 284) Those units of general meaning that did not respond to the research question were left out. Special attention must be paid to nonverbal and paralinguistic communication, such as laughter, emphases, pauses, as they might emphasise or alter the meaning of the spoken words. (Hycner, 1985, p. 287)

Similar to the previous procedure, Hycner advises that if there is any doubt whether a certain unit of general meaning is relevant to the research question, it is better to include it. (Hycner, 1985, p. 284) Once the research question was addressed to all the units of general meaning in all the interviews, it became more clear whether the ambiguous units were relevant or not. This step required a certain level of judgement and I was constantly going back to my self-reflection notes in order to be as open as possible to the emerging data.

4.4.6 Clustering units of general meaning

Once the redundancies were left out, the final list of units of relevant meaning emerged:

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| – International environment | – Challenge: stress |
| – Socialising | – Challenge: Finnish education system |
| – Desire to be useful | |
| – Learning experience | – Challenge: money |
| – Challenge: big workload | – Personal strengths |
| – Challenge: personal relationships | – Personal goals |
| – Challenge: high expectations | – Giving back |
| – Challenge: time, free time | – Work ethic |

- | | |
|--|---------------------------------|
| – Work experience | – Learning about one's self |
| – Positive emotions | – Value basis |
| – Approval | – Feeling appreciated |
| – Community | – Feeling of service |
| – Negative emotions: stress, peer pressure | – Life meaning |
| – Culture shock | – Quality of life |
| – Cultural experience | – Expectation to do good |
| – Encouragement to volunteer | – Flexibility |
| – Breaking stereotypes | – Personal development |
| – Hobby | – Contributing |
| – Future work | – Negative: distraction |
| | – Opportunities and experiences |

Once the units of relevant meaning were established, the next procedure to be performed was to check if any of the units of relevant meaning naturally cluster together and create recurring themes.

Hycner (1985, p. 290) points out that at this step more so than ever the judgement and skills of the researcher are involved. This also increases the risk of the researcher's presuppositions interfering with the research. In order to avoid this, I was constantly referring back to my self-reflection notes used during the phenomenological reduction procedure. It must be also pointed out that due to the subjectivity of this procedure, the results might differ depending on the researcher's perspective and their skill and experience. (Hycner, 1985, p. 290) It was not always easy to decide which units cluster together and another researcher might have grouped them in a different way. This largely owes to the nature of human phenomena. They are naturally intertwined and cannot be separated. (Hycner, 1985, p. 290) The process of clustering was performed and the themes that emerged can be seen in the next section.

4.4.7 Completing themes from clusters of meaning

The final step in the analysis was to group the clusters of meaning into themes relevant to the research question. The final themes that emerged from the clusters of meaning are outlined in Table 2.

Table 2. Themes relevant to the research question

Clusters of meaning	Themes
Learning experience, Personal strengths and goals, Work ethic, Personal development, Future work, Life meaning, Cultural experience, Culture shock, Positive emotions	Personal and professional development
Desire to be useful, Giving back, Breaking stereotypes, Values, Feeling of service, Contributing, Desire to learn, Personal goals	Moral ideology
International environment, Socialising, Community, Hobby, Feeling appreciated, Positive emotions	Social connections and community
Approval, Encouragement to volunteer, Feeling appreciated, Peer pressure, Standard of living, Education system, Expectation to do good	Social norm
Workload, Personal relationships, High expectations, Time, Stress, Education system, Money, Culture shock	Challenges

5 Findings

The themes provided the framework within which the findings are discussed in this chapter. Personal and professional development, moral ideology, social connections and community, social norm and challenges are discussed from the perspective of the participants.

5.1 Personal and Professional Development

Personal and professional development were important for all participants. All of them referred to volunteering as a learning experience and a safe place to discover one's strengths and weaknesses. For example, participant 4 considers volunteering as *"a good add to the CV"* and said:

"I think it's important for your future if you don't have a lot of work experience, like I don't, so it's a good way to learn how to work in a team and well, also to get to know other students and the student community."

Participant 2 also referred to volunteering as a good try-out at work:

"if you try it on volunteering you are not like... hmm.... connected to that place in any way, you're not taking a salary, just ... if you mess it up, you just leave and then there's nothing to come afterwards. That's like, that's it. But at work there are a lot of things at stake. For example, if you mess up at work, like if you are a bad person you would get a bad review, which you'll never get to another job and then you would have to switch your career to a totally different field and it would be just your first time cause you said something wrong or said something that didn't match the other people's culture. But if you have tried these like activities or volunteering before, so you know what people usually talk about, you know how people deal with each other, so whenever you work at some place, it's different."

The prospects of personal development and future work in an international environment were a motivating factor for participant 5:

"For me it was much about personal development, which I mentioned a few times already. Like when I started university I was a little bit shy and not so.. I would say I'm a very introverted person but I wanted to learn to communicate with other people and understand different backgrounds and like, I'm like so curious like, because I study foreign languages and culture I'm very interested in those in general to get to like immerse yourself completely into this sort of

things when you're working in an international environment. So I feel like... and I'm hoping someday I would, I would like to work in a field where I do something related to international things so I feel like this is a good practice for myself."

All participants reported that they have gained new skills while volunteering, such as leading skills, management skills and working in a team. A big motivating factor for them were also the opportunities for personal development that they got. One of the participants said that before joining a volunteering activity he had never met a person from a different background. He reports how he battled culture shock by joining ESN:

"So basically I come from a different continent and I think people's traditions are totally different so one of my culture shocks was that everything is different, so I thought if I join a group of European volunteers or European students, it would be much easier to get used to the culture and remove the culture shock, so that was one of the reasons to join."

Participants 3 and 5 remember that they used to be very shy prior to volunteering and acknowledge that their experience at ESN has helped them become more social. Participant 5 recounts:

"I feel like I've gotten a lot of confidence. Like I said earlier, I feel like I'm an introverted person and like, I was very shy when I first came to university but now nobody could tell (*laughing*). And like now I feel like stuff like performing, talking in front of people and things like that, they don't scare me so much anymore. When at some point it was very difficult (*laughing*). Like it felt like the worst thing and now it feels like I can do it, it comes quite naturally. And of course, like, meeting all these amazing people and you just get such opportunities and experiences that you will not get otherwise."

Participant 3 recalls:

"I was a completely different person, I think I wasn't enjoying life as much. I was a better student, to be honest, because of course, if you have less social life, you have more time to focus but yeah, now I think I enjoy my life more."

From these statements we can observe how strong the effect of volunteering was on these participants. The positive emotions and the skills they got out of it had such a good benefit on them that it kept motivating them to do volunteer work. This is obvious also from the next statement:

“I guess if I’m filled with things to do I would do it less but I think still, I would do it because it makes me relax. It’s actually useful, it won’t be like a waste of time but it will be like a social fulfilling in your brain that will actually make me relax and do the other things better. So yeah, I don’t think there is any downfall. Even if I’m filled with other stuff I would still try to do it a little bit cause it actually helps me. Like I mostly do it for myself actually.”

Several times during the interviews it came up that the participants are volunteering to a big extent for their own benefit because volunteering gives them positive emotions, such as feelings of appreciation, satisfaction and belonging. This is visible from the following statements:

“I think people appreciate me a lot because of that and of course that’s always good to feel appreciated because I feel I’m of service and I’m doing something good for people, I feel like I belong and I have a meaning in life.”

“It makes you feel good when you do something, like you contribute to something and you can see the difference that you make.”

In terms of professional development, the participants reported they have enhanced their skills and have gained new ones. They were aware of how that can help them in their careers and could be one of the reasons why they were motivated to continue volunteering. On a personal level, volunteering gave them many positive emotions. They felt that they belonged to a community, it gave them confidence and improved their lives overall.

5.2 Moral Ideology

Moral ideology was also an important motivating factor for the participants. Several of them reported that they wanted to be useful and had the desire to give back. This is visible from the statement of participant 1 who had attended ESN events during her exchange:

“I wanted to kind of offer the others, like the exchange students, what I got when I was [on exchange], when I was in ESN events, like I wanted to give them that, I wanted to... yeah. And I also wanted to kind of be the Finnish person who is like nice to them and like helping them when they come to Finland (...)”

Participant 4 felt supportive of the values of ESN and that is one of the reasons he decided to join the organisation. He said:

“I like the idea of mixing people, supporting... like the whole Erasmus experience is like very important I think, that’s kind of what I got inside my head and really changes people, makes them open up and like really get to know themselves and well, I like that and then I wanted to promote that, I wanted to do it by myself and then I think ESN was like a tool to reach more people. That’s why, that was my goal of being part of ESN, just like this platform can help me, you know, if I want to make some event it can help me reach others and that’s why I think it’s useful. It’s like a support method to do the same. Of course, people can do it without this, like everyone in Erasmus they just organise themselves on their own but there are some people who maybe need.. they don’t make friends so easily and are introverted and I think ESN can really help some people like us, it can make them connect and help them integrate.”

A few participants talked about how this international experience “destroys the stereotypes about everything. Because you see people in real life, in action, so you understand it doesn’t relate to any stereotype, to anything, it’s just people and minds.” Another participant also referred to the same by saying that “the world is very multicultural and interconnected now so we need to adapt our brain to stop stereotyping that hard because maybe it’s not as useful anymore as it was in the past.”

5.3 Social Connections and Community

Social connections was probably the biggest motivator for the participants to take up volunteering. They all expressed that they wanted to meet people and that they wanted to be in an international environment.

“I was doing my exchange (...) and after that I kinda felt like I want to stay in this international environment so the first thing I did when I came back to Finland, to Oulu, was that I attended an ESN meeting.”

For another participant ESN was the place where he met friends when he arrived in Finland and did not know anybody:

“I was mainly just looking for friends cause outside you don’t usually have a lot of activities if you’re not joining anything. But then if you’re joining a lot of activities you meet people, you work on something together, you do stuff together but on the class you’re just workmates, you just work on a small project without having any fun or just finish it and throw it away, never meet again. But if you’re playing a game or football together you just remember the fun stuff afterwards.”

From this statement it is visible that having fun and enjoying his time at ESN were important for this participant. He explained further:

“Cause basically it’s the place where right now I meet a lot of people, still. Because at work everyone is just focused on, for example, achieving the target or finishing the task that they have, just everything is like a beehive at work. But then when you go to something like a student activity it feels like so relaxing and so soothing that everyone is just having fun and enjoying. And then you get to interact with a lot of different cultures, different people, you get to understand a lot of different things. And it helps with, I think, with maturity.”

5.4 Social Norm

Social norm, or its absence, also had some role in the volunteer’s decision to enrol in a volunteering activity. The participants were from three different countries so the societal systems were different in all of them. One of the Finnish participants reported:

“Actually, I feel like in Finland we don’t have such like culture for volunteering, like I don’t remember hearing about too many options for volunteering and things that you can do. But I can definitely remember when I was in England these sort of things would come up constantly in the... just like even the school social media and then whenever you would be in town you would see posters “Volunteer here” and “You can join this” and a lot of people were doing some sort of volunteer work at least every now and then. So I feel like it’s not that much of a thing in Finland. Like Finnish people like to maybe contribute money on things but they don’t like to contribute their time.”

The other Finnish participant responded along the same lines:

“But I think overall, people don’t really look up to volunteering or people who do volunteering work. ... I don’t know. Like, in a way, some people do respect it and see like, the value of it but I don’t think we talk enough about it.. I don’t know, it’s not really like a big topic in Finland I think.”

She explained further that at school they had not discussed volunteering or what opportunities there are to do volunteer work. However, at university she had a course in her teacher studies, in which the topic was discussed and they visited the local centre for sustainable development and explored ways in which they as teachers can inspire their future students to volunteer.

The third Finnish participant reported that in her opinion volunteering is looked upon in Finland and they had various extracurricular projects, in which they were encouraged to participate. She also got the impression that volunteering is good for one's CV and is valued.

The participant from the Arab region reported that in his home country there is some push from society to get involved in something but that does not necessarily need to be volunteering. When asked if he has ever felt social pressure to volunteer he said:

“Not at all. But if you look at it in a different perspective, so basically back home if you're not volunteering, you're just sitting and doing nothing, which people don't actually like. Like if you're doing nothing, that doesn't make sense. But if you're just meeting people, if you're trying to get out of your own head, meet different kinds of people, maybe at some point you meet your new boss, maybe you meet your new partner in company, or anything. So that's one way to look at it. But if you're not doing anything, that's one of the worst things ever. But if you're just trying, that's nice. So you can say that the society pushes a little towards making something, it doesn't have to be volunteering but at least towards having an activity.”

In the interview with the participant from Latin America the important issue of standard of living came up.

“There's many kind-hearted people who try to volunteer and do all these things but of course, I mean, it's a poor country and I feel like when the quality of living of a country is not so high, many people are just trying to survive and I guess that's a relationship with high quality standards, high living quality standards. In high quality standards you feel like you wanna help because you can but yeah, people are very helpful and even if they don't have much everybody is like very kind-hearted.”

For the most part the participants' families and friends expressed positive opinions about their involvement in ESN and in volunteering in general:

“I think, especially my parents, they're like proud of me when I'm doing volunteering in different things. They like the fact that I want to work and I want to learn new things and I'm active in you know, in my life. (*laughing*) That I just don't like sit at home and do nothing.”

And this participant was encouraged by his parents to volunteer in a way of giving back:

“Well, yes, I don't think it's bad but yes, of course. I guess I always thought that [back home] I was from a middle class family so we were okay and my parents were always telling me “You are more fortunate than others, you should give back if that will make you feel good”. And

yeah, I feel like it's something good, I don't feel like it's bad pressure. So yeah, I feel the expectation. I think it's good to make people feel expected to be good so they can fulfil that expectation so that's related to this Pygmalion effect. If you expect people to be good, to be smart, they will start to show what you expect from them."

Another participant's parents expressed wonder at why she would do something for free, since the amount of work was sometimes quite big. However, the participants' families were predominantly supportive of their decision to volunteer and did not express disagreement. The participants however sometimes felt pressure from their social circles. For example, the following statement shows how this participant felt peer pressure to join a volunteering activity:

"I think in the university, well there it's, it's kind of encouraged to join these like, student... how do you call it, guilds, and like, the stuff that they do. And in my friend group it's kind of like encouraged because I have a lot of friends who have been in guilds and have been really active in the guilds, even like presidents of the guilds. And I think that in the university, well in the university I feel like it's looked up to. ... And I feel like in the university I should always be doing more for kind of like my community there. It's a nice thing to have those communities and those guilds and stuff but I actually was in [my guild's] board for one year just because I was kind of pressured to be there. (...) Yeah.. I feel like the people who volunteer in the boards in the university are looked up to. More than, like, in the university it's a big thing but in the society not so big."

Another participant also talked about the student societies which are popular at Finnish universities:

"...it's definitely something that it comes naturally to me. So I don't feel like it was so much pressure. Although I can understand that how some people might feel like that because I feel like everyone's doing something and if you're not, then people are like "Why are you not part of anything?!" (*laughing*) And if you just want to participate in like interest societies or something for events and stuff but you don't feel like taking a board position or at least join some task force or something...(laughing) then people are... it feels like they're judging you, like "Why don't you do anything, you're just taking all the fun but don't contribute anything."

From these two statements it is visible that at the university there is a certain level of pressure that the students should be active in something. The following participant did not feel pressure to join a volunteering activity but heard comments from his friends that his volunteer work is not so valuable:

“So basically yes, my friends here, like they were commenting about me joining ESN ... But specifically ESN, not the other volunteering activities. Because they know that mainly ESN’s job is having fun with new students, it’s not actually giving them course or value or anything, it’s just having fun and enjoying your life and enjoying the new city that you’re in. ... But yeah, basically couple of them were joining other activities but I was the only one joining like a having-fun-activity so that was weird for them. They told me that “you’re not actually doing anything that might be even stressful”. And I was like why should I join something stressful in the first place?! (*laughing*)”

From the participants’ statements it became clear that social expectations played a role in their volunteering experience. It has not necessarily been their core motivator but it is a theme that came up in all the interviews.

5.5 Challenges

Challenges are an important part of the participants’ volunteering experience since they indicate what obstacles they had to overcome in order to continue being motivated to volunteer. Among them were lack of time, stress, big workload, other personal obligations. On several occasions participants reported that team work was not always easy and sometimes personal relationships in the volunteer group were challenging. This is obvious from the following statement:

“The challenges were mostly with the other people, like within the team and we had too much work for this small group of people that we were. And everyone was kind of expecting a lot from us also. In a way like.. I feel like people were expecting a lot from me at some point. Like all of the students seemed to like expect a lot sometimes and then we felt like we don’t have enough people to do all these cool stuff that they want from us.. and then as I started to take more and more responsibilities, then people expected a lot from me. So in the end I felt like I was doing too much but before that it was nice, when the workload was okay it was really nice and really worth my time and I learnt so much. ... And that was what kind of took the fun out of it in the end. If you have too much work and you’re not getting paid and you’re doing a lot, then it’s really easy to lose the motivation.”

Other people’s expectations and the big workload led to the loss of motivation for this participant. She also said that not much team building was done at ESN Oulu and that led to the negative atmosphere in the team. Another participant also said that “personal relationships were sometimes not as good”. Other challenges were time and external stress.

“So it has taken a lot of my time and even sometimes when I was working at my first company, some days I stayed up late doing something related to the volunteering. And it affected the next day, so I went to work late. It was not the best experience.”

Another participant also said that “it takes a lot of your time if you want to fully volunteer” and that volunteering was a distraction from other important obligations:

“sometimes I’m distracting myself with volunteer work when I should be doing my thesis or my studies, something like which is a little bit less fun (*laughing*) so to say (*laughing*).”

Fitting volunteering into one’s busy schedule involving studies and work was a challenge for all participants. This is clearly visible from the following statement by participant 5:

“...this gets very political now but the current system, for example in Finland, which is like bad to say because we have free education and we actually get paid for studying for some time, but there is so much pressure from like the society and maybe the government and just in general to maybe work and study and like to focus your time on other things so sometimes I feel like, it’s like a lot of people would maybe not have time because of that. For example, for me now that I don’t get the study benefit anymore, I’ve been studying for too long (*laughing*), now it’s like, I feel like maybe I don’t have the money and maybe I don’t have the time. It’s always either or. Either I will have the time but probably don’t have the money to do things but then again if I would go to work, I wouldn’t have time to do these things that I maybe care about a little bit more.”

This statement points out important challenges that students in Finnish universities have to overcome throughout their studies. She continues to talk about the inclusivity of the education system:

“Yeah, this is something I’ve been talking... like it’s been coming up a lot lately in social media as well. Like, people are talking if the school system is not inclusive enough for like when thinking about different backgrounds where people come from, or like if anything sudden happens, like for example, in my case I was on sick leave for a year and I did not get like.. well, during that time I wasted a lot of my these what we call like benefit months. So I ran out of those. I feel like the system should be more flexible. I understand it’s trying to push people to graduate so that people don’t just stay in university forever but it’s not necessarily taking into account people who might suffer from mental illness, for example or other.. like, things happen in life, you can’t know.. like you could suffer a trauma or something and that would delay your studies even if you’re like not necessarily taking a break, it can still like affect how much you

can do. So I feel like... of course, that is like, it's hard to say like what should we do and how to fix it. It's just.. there is a problem and we should... hopefully someone will come up with a way to fix it. (*laughing*)”

This participant addressed important issues relevant to many students.

Overall, the participants’ experience at ESN was good despite the challenges. The main obstacles were time and relationships within the team.

6 Examining the Findings from the Perspective of the Theory of Planned Behaviour

In this chapter the results are reported separately for every participant based on the structure of the theory of planned behaviour: attitude, social norm and perceived behavioural control. Table 3 provides a snapshot of the findings. The chapter ends with a discussion of the results.

Participant 1

Attitude

Participant 1 is a Finnish student. Her attitude towards volunteering is positive. She wants to be in an international environment and has some goals for professional development. She thinks volunteering is an important learning experience.

Social norm

The participant does not recall hearing about volunteering opportunities at school. She thinks volunteering is not popular in Finnish society. Her relatives do not expect her to do volunteer work but they are proud of her for being active in her life. At university however, she felt that she had to volunteer because everybody does it and felt “pressured” to join the board of her guild. She thinks at university volunteering is looked up to but in society not so much.

Perceived behavioural control

The main obstacles for this student were the personal relationships within the team. There were not enough team building activities and the expectations towards her were too high. The workload was also too big for the small group of volunteers. She would like to continue volunteering in other fields.

Participant 2

Attitude

Participant 2 is an international student from the Arab region. His attitude towards volunteering is very positive. He thinks it is an important learning experience and a good first try-out at work. He is aware of the benefits volunteering can have for his personal and professional de-

velopment. Meeting new people is a big motivating factor for him to volunteer, as well as getting used to the new culture and improving his communication in English.

Social norm

The participant said that doing something in one's free time is important in his society. That does not necessarily need to be volunteering but it is important that the person is active in something. His friends in Finland who are also doing volunteering activities do not deem his participation in ESN as a valuable one because from their point of view creating fun activities for international students is not such an important task.

Perceived behavioural control

The main obstacles for participant 2 are time and external stress. However, he would continue volunteering because it brings him positive emotions and helps him meet people.

Participant 3

Attitude

Participant 3 is a Finnish student. Her attitude towards volunteering is positive. She thinks volunteering can be helpful for her future job since she lacks work experience. She decided to join ESN so she would have some hobby and she also wanted to practice speaking English and interact with international students. She also wanted to have a volunteering experience to add to her CV.

Social norm

She thinks volunteer work is encouraged in Finland as she has heard it can be beneficial for one's career. She has not felt pressure to volunteer but admits that at university everyone is involved in something so sometimes she feels she has to do something as well.

Perceived behavioural control

The main obstacle for this participant was time due to her studies. She also reported that personal relationships within the ESN team were sometimes not so good. She says she would keep volunteering but she would prefer to have an actual job.

Participant 4

Attitude

Participant 4 is an international student from Latin America. He has a positive attitude towards volunteering. The values of ESN were in line with his own and he wanted to support what they are doing. He also had some personal goals related to his line of studies. The effect volunteering had on him was quite big as it made him happier and helped him enjoy his life more.

Social norm

The participant's parents were happy to see a positive change in him and encouraged him. The participant felt appreciated and that he was doing something good so that gave him a feeling of belonging and being of service. He thinks volunteering is not very popular in his country because of the lower standard of living. He associates volunteering with a higher standard of living because then one is actually able to give something. He comes from a middle class family and his parents encouraged him to give back to the community since he is more fortunate than others. However, he does not define that as pressure and thinks it is important to be expected to do good.

Perceived behavioural control

The main challenge for this participant was time but he reported he would continue volunteering at least a little, as it brings him positive emotions and makes his life better.

Participant 5

Attitude

Participant 5 is a Finnish student. Her attitude towards volunteering is very positive. She is interested in foreign cultures and languages and that motivated her to join ESN. She would like to work with international matters in future and she sees volunteering at ESN as a good practice for that. The volunteering experience has taught her new skills and has helped her on her journey of personal development.

Social norm

The participant said that in her opinion volunteering is not a popular activity in Finland. She compared it to England where volunteering was a topic that was constantly talked about. In her opinion Finns would rather donate money than invest their time. In terms of her own circle of people, the participant reported that her parents were a bit surprised she would devote her time and effort for free but did not oppose her decision. Her friends however, are all involved in some type of volunteering activity. She said that she understands why some people would feel pressure to volunteer as she said everybody at university is involved in something but she has not personally felt pressure to do it.

Perceived behavioural control

The main challenges for this participant are time and money. She talked extensively about the Finnish educational system and the benefits Finnish students receive during their studies. She explained that it is a constant struggle between having time and having money. If she does not work she would have the time but lack the money and the other way around.

Table 3. Snapshot of findings

	Attitude	Social norm	Perceived behavioural control
Participant 1	positive, volunteering is an important learning experience	moderate influence: peer pressure	main obstacle: time, big workload
Participant 2	positive, volunteering is a good try-out at work life	moderate influence: social encouragement	main obstacle: time, external stress
Participant 3	positive, hobby, professional development	low influence: no pressure	main obstacles: time, paid job
Participant 4	positive, shared values, giving back to the community	low to moderate influence	main obstacle: time
Participant 5	positive, opportunities for personal and professional development	low influence: no pressure	main obstacle: time, money

All participants' attitudes towards volunteering were positive. They thought it is an important learning experience and were aware of the benefits it can have for their personal and profes-

sional development. They all had some personal goals they wanted to achieve through volunteering, for example getting better at English, learning new skills, finding friends and socialising with international students. Some of them had also moral reasons to join ESN. For example, participant 4 reported his values were aligned with those of ESN and that made him join the organisation.

Volunteering had a varying level of popularity among the participants' societies. For example, they reported that volunteering is not so popular in Finnish society but it is a quite common student activity at university where students are joining guilds and interest groups. Participant 1 reported feeling pressure to join the board of her guild by her peers. Participant 3 and 5 confirmed that it is easy to feel the pressure since many students are involved in some extracurricular activity and some level of judgement can be felt if one is not involved in anything. However, they personally had not felt they had to join an activity. Participant 4 made an important remark about the relationship between volunteering and the standard of living. He believes that in high standards of living people want to help because they have the financial ability. As we learnt from chapter 2.4 this is one way of interpreting the varying degrees of involvement in volunteering activities among different societies.

The participants' families were either positive or neutral towards their involvement in volunteering. Participant 1 feels that her family was proud of her for being active and participant 4 was encouraged by his family to give back to society if he would like to. However, it is not possible to say whether their opinions determined the participants' decisions.

The factors impeding the participants' involvement at ESN were mostly outside of their control. They included lack of time due to studies and paid work, as well as external stress. A big challenge for participant 1 was the big workload in relation to the number of volunteers. Two of the participants reported that personal relationships within the team were not very good and that decreased their motivation.

The theory of planned behaviour states that the bigger the personal and social beliefs are that a certain behaviour is desirable, and the stronger one's evaluation of one's own skills is, the higher the chance is that the individual will perform the behaviour. (Randle & Dolnicar, 2009, p. 230-231) The results of the study showed that the strongest motivating factor for the participants was their own attitude towards volunteering. They wanted to socialise and develop personally and professionally. In general, volunteering is favoured by their societies and some participants thought that it might be a good step towards their professional development. The

social circles of the participants were all positive or neutral towards volunteering. Therefore, based on this research, it is not possible to conclude how big role social beliefs had on each individual. All participants were eager to expand their skills and that was one of the main motivating factors for them.

7 Reliability, Ethics and Evaluation

One of the limitations of the present research is that the concept of volunteering was not pre-defined to the participants and some of their statements included instances of helping rather than an organised way of doing unpaid work. However, as all of them were or had been ESN volunteers and the research focused on that particular organisation, I believe this limitation did not affect the data.

Some other limitations include the small sample size which made generalising impossible and the lack of a general conclusion on the subject of what motivates Finnish and international students to volunteer. However, the purpose of phenomenological research is not to generalise because human phenomena are too personal to be generalised. (Hycner, 1985, p. 295) The research aimed to investigate the phenomenon from the point of view of each participant and explore the motivations of that specific person, therefore its purpose has been achieved. It is important to also point out that there is no one way of conducting phenomenological research and other researchers might perform the analysis in a different way.

A big criticism towards phenomenological research is that the subjectivity of the researcher will prevent the emergence of any valuable data. However, the orientation of phenomenological research is different from the one of natural sciences. Objectivity in phenomenological research means “trying to be as comprehensive as possible in responding to the whole phenomenon” (Sardello, 1971 cited by Hycner, 1985, p. 296-297) and “utilising methods which will be as faithful to the phenomenon as possible”. (Hycner, 1985, p. 297) Moreover, completing the phenomenological reduction minimizes the issue. I completed that process, which was essential in ensuring that my experiences and preconceptions did not affect the research.

In terms of ethics, I made sure that all participants were informed about their rights. They were informed that they are being recorded and studied. They had the right to stop the interview at any time and all data would have been erased. All data was kept anonymous and the identity of the participants was protected.

8 Conclusion

As it was pointed out, the findings cannot be generalised but nevertheless, they gave insight into the world of five student volunteers at a Finnish university. Valuable information about their values and the challenges they faced was uncovered. This information can be used by volunteer organisations and education specialists to understand student volunteers and their needs better.

The methodology chosen for the study was appropriate as it provided an opportunity for an in-depth analysis of the students' experiences. Semi-structured interviews were the chosen method of obtaining the data as they allowed for a personal account of the participants' experiences. Phenomenological reduction was performed in order to avoid presuppositions and bias affect the analysis. That step was imperative in order to perform phenomenological research.

The data obtained from the interviews provided insight into the values and motivations of the participants and how the volunteering experience affected them. All participants had a positive attitude towards volunteering. They were aware of how doing volunteer work can be useful for their professional development and that was a core motivating factor for them. They reported that it had been a good way to gain new skills and prepare for work life. Personal development was also an important factor which motivated them to volunteer. Some of the participants started volunteering in order to battle culture shock and introversion and reported that the volunteering experience has helped them enjoy their time and live a more fulfilling life. Socialising was an important motivating factor because it gave the participants a lot of joy and feelings of appreciation. It is evident from the account of one of the participants that when she stopped feeling appreciated, her motivation declined. Positive emotions was one of the few things the volunteer gained while doing unpaid work and it had a big impact on her motivation. Some of the participants reported about having underlying moral values which influenced their decision to volunteer. They ranged from wanting to make international students feel at home to helping introverted people find their voice among the crowd.

The challenges the participants faced are an important part of their volunteering experience. They all struggled to fit volunteering in their busy schedules and sometimes it took a toll on them. However, the positive emotions outgrew the lack of time and energy and the participants learnt how to manage their time better. One participant in particular talked at length

about the Finnish education system and how it makes the participation in volunteering activities difficult because of its flaws in inclusivity. The challenges, which a few of the participants found particularly hard, were the personal relationships in the team and that led to their withdrawal from the organisation.

It is important to also discuss the effect volunteering had on the participants. They learnt new professional skills and developed on a personal level as well. They got to interact with people from different cultures and improve their language skills. Most of all, they said it has made them fulfilled, they became more social and even started enjoying their lives more. Most of them want volunteering to remain part of their lives in future.

Motivation is multifaceted and a strictly personal human phenomenon, therefore it is hard to conclude how big an influence cultural background had on the participants' decision to join a volunteering activity. It was found out that volunteering is a respected activity in the communities of the volunteers with a varying degree of popularity. In Finland it is a popular spare time activity at universities. All Finnish participants acknowledged that at university almost everyone is involved in some student society and it is easy to feel the pressure to be active. However, only one participant reported feeling pressure into joining her student guild's board. The other two claimed that it has been solely their decision to join but it is not clear whether they were influenced in some way by the rest of the student community. One of the students commented that even though volunteering is quite popular at Finnish universities, it is not something that is talked about outside the student world. She commented that in her opinion Finns prefer to donate money rather than their time. It was found out that in the Arab region volunteering or taking up any kind of extracurricular activity is highly looked up to. The participant who was a representative of that region already had a vast volunteering experience before joining ESN, which, it could be argued, is due to society's push towards young people to fill their time with useful activities. The participant from Latin America associates volunteering with people with a higher standard of living as they have the means to help. He explained that in his home country many people are struggling financially and volunteering is not part of their lives. He started volunteering when he moved to Europe. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that culture did play a role at the participants' motivation to volunteer. However, as it was pointed out earlier, culture does not end at the borders of a country. We can also talk about university culture or youth culture, evidence of which was found among the Finnish participants. Moreover, societies nowadays are getting more and more diverse and a mix of cultures can be observed, which in turn gives birth to new cultures.

Previous research gives evidence that cultural groups do differ in terms of their motivation to volunteer. (Randle & Dolnicar, 2009, Grönlund & al., 2011) The research conducted by Randle and Dolnicar (2009), which also utilises the theory of planned behaviour, points at attitude and social norm as leading in determining volunteer enrolment. Attitude was a core motivating factor for the participants in this study and social norm also had influence on their motivation. The present research can be further developed by looking into different volunteer organisations, by increasing the number of the participants and controlling some of the factors, such as gender, education, religious beliefs.

In conclusion, it can be said that motivation is a highly subjective human phenomenon with different people engaging in volunteering for different personal and professional reasons. The research indicated that cultural background can influence an individual's motivation to volunteer. However, the openness and fluidity of culture allows us to get exposed to many different kinds of culture throughout our lives and they can have just as powerful influence on us.

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Appendix

Guiding interview questions:

1. Tell me a bit about yourself and how you started volunteering at ESN. How did you find the organization? Did you have any other volunteering experience before that?
2. What sparked your interest in that specific organisation?
3. What kind of work did you do there?
4. In your opinion, why was it worth your time and energy?
5. What kind of volunteer worker are you? What are your personal characteristics?
6. Did you have certain personal goals that you wanted to achieve through volunteering?
7. Why do you think it's important to do volunteer work?
8. Which people in your life you would consider important? What did they think about your choice to volunteer at ESN?
9. In your opinion, how is volunteering looked on in your home country? Do you get encouraged to volunteer? In what areas?
10. Have you discussed volunteering at school and have you been encouraged to do volunteer work?
11. Have you ever had the feeling that it's expected from you to volunteer, by society or by your family?
12. Has volunteering affected you in some way?
13. What factors would prevent you from volunteering?
14. What would make it easier?
15. Do you think volunteering will remain part of your life in future?